

29th District Report

Regional Transportation

I voted against the Regional Transportation bill that allows King, Pierce and Snohomish counties to collectively form a regional transportation district because it will be governed by the county councils from each of the participating counties with councilmember votes weighted by population. My concern is that this puts Pierce County at a political disadvantage when it comes time to spend our tax dollars on projects that benefit our citizens. I favored the House version that would have given each county independent decision-making about raising taxes and paying for their own traffic solutions.



New Narrows Bridge

The addition of a new Tacoma Narrows Bridge will help significantly reduce congestions on Highway 16 and give our citizens more time with their families. The bridge is not dependant on the other transportation packages. Construction will begin soon.



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Washington State
Department of Printing

2002 Legislative Session Report

Representative
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P.O. Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600
Printed on recycled paper



Rep. Steve Kirby 29th District Session 2002 Wrap-up *Easing the Political Gridlock*

29th District Report: *2002 Legislative Session*

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Dear Neighbors,

In my previous newsletters I expressed a great deal of frustration with partisan politics and the unnecessary political gridlock it causes. This year was much improved. Issues that were bogged down in partisan power struggles for years were FINALLY allowed to move forward. Although it was a short session we managed to send the Governor 388 bills. There may be hope for this place after all.

Of course, the two major accomplishments this legislative session were the passage of a statewide transportation budget, which will be sent to the voters in November, and dealing with a \$1.5 billion budget shortfall.

But that's not all we have to show for our 60 days work. We strengthened laws to protect the rights and safety of working people. We outlawed the criminal mistreatment of children, making it illegal to leave them with sex offenders or expose them to chemicals in meth labs. We passed laws that will make our schools and neighborhoods safer, require criminals to give up DNA samples for a nationwide data base, restrict the use and handling of certain personal information, closed loopholes in political campaign disclosure laws, and we repealed the portion of the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax that was inadvertently overlooked in I-695.

There is a lot of unfinished business for the 2003 Legislative Session, including another potential \$1 billion dollar budget shortfall. Now, more than ever, it's important to put aside the partisan politics so that we can avoid further political gridlock.

I look forward to hearing from you, and to working for you in the future.

Sincerely,

Rep. Steve Kirby

Transportation

Few would deny that traffic congestion is becoming intolerable. Just try driving on Pacific Avenue or Highway 16 or the Port of Tacoma at rush hour. You'll see thousands of citizens stuck in traffic when they could be home with their families. You'll see trucks delivering freight to and from our places of employment sitting there too. The bottom line is that gridlock is stealing time from our families and money from our businesses and employers.

Let the People Decide

The statewide transportation package that was passed is expected to stimulate our economy by relieving our congested highways and creating up to 20,000 new construction jobs at a time when we really need them. I supported the House version because it delivers on a promise we made to the people early on: *an opportunity to vote on the package.*

If the referendum passes, the gas tax will increase by 9 cents —5 cents in January 2003 and 4 cents in 2004.

The 29th Legislative District will greatly benefit from this package if it passes in November. Major projects in our area include:

- Funding the design of the Cross-Base Highway connecting I-5 to State Route 7 in southern part of our district.
- Widening I-5 from SR-512 to the Pierce/King County line to build HOV lanes, which will also be added to SR-16 from I-5 to Gig Harbor.
- Rebuilding the Nalley Valley Viaduct to improve the flow of traffic, reduce back-ups from accidents, and relieve a congestion chokepoint that frequently backs up deep into our district.
- Millions of dollars of transportation funding for city and county governments.



29th District Report: The 2002 Legislative Session

Balancing the Budget

The good news is that we patched the \$1.5 billion hole in our state budget. The bad news is we pretty much did it with duct tape and rubber bands. It was a temporary fix, but it buys us some time for the economy to turn around, or to identify future cuts in state services — whichever event occurs first.

I supported the budget on the House side because it made the least amount of cuts. The end result however, was a negotiated budget between the House and the Senate. This was not an easy thing to do. It cut \$680 million in important services, asked state departments to cut 5 percent from their budgets, but avoided increasing taxes.

Unfortunately, we balanced a good part of the budget by borrowing a small portion of our state's tobacco settlement. Our economists tell us that this was a better alternative than making further cuts in social services or raising taxes in a recession. It is not unlike what businesses routinely do when they borrow against their receivables. Fortunately, about 90% of the settlement will still be used for its original purpose.

If all goes well, by next biennium we'll have enough to cover the difference. If not, we'll be singing the same budget blues in January.

Capital Projects

In addition to the cross-base highway and the new Nalley Valley viaduct, we approved funding for many important local projects including funds for a new Southend Pool, improvements at our community and technical colleges, the William Factory Small Business Incubator, the Asian Pacific Cultural Center, and Tacoma Water's second supply pipeline.

Getting the Job Done

**60 days of long hours and hard work paid off.
This year the legislature passed nearly 400 bills that will:**

- Promote economic revitalization
- Protect the environment
- Streamline government permits
- Streamline the criminal justice system
- Deliver safe, clean water for people, farms and fish
- Create uniform, safe food service standards
- Help to ensure the safety of abandoned babies
- Provide assistance to domestic violence victims
- Give collective bargaining rights for certain classes of employment
- Penalize employers who mis-classify jobs to avoid paying benefits
- Expand the uses of family leave
- Limit mandatory overtime for nurses
- Toughen child pornography laws
- Toughen penalties for numerous crimes
- Provide assistance to crime victims
- Protect certain personal information
- Continue to crack down on meth labs
- Enhance rural economic development

Many said it couldn't be done, but I think we've proven that the process works when we put aside the partisan games and focus on the real needs of the people.

Biggest Disappointments

Prescription Drug Costs

Soaring prescription drug prices are continuing to gouge families, especially seniors, who typically fill 18 prescriptions per year. We came close to passing a new law that would help, but we couldn't quite get it done this year. This is an issue that needs immediate attention.



We Can't Continue to be the "Dumping Ground" for Criminals and the Mentally Ill

Last year the legislature pre-empted our local laws and forced Pierce County to house all of the state's civilly committed violent sex predators. This year we passed legislation that will disburse some of them among six other counties. We in Pierce County still have a disproportionate share of the state's criminals and mentally ill, but this was a big step in the right direction.